

Islamic Identity in Turkey's Orientations towards the European Union 1992-2004 A.D

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ABSTRACT

Turkey's membership in the European Union is one of the most historical and decisive events in the construction of the social, economic and political structure of Europe. It is clear that Turkey is not a strong candidate like the others. Turkey is challenging the European system in order to be a part of it.

Ironically, this challenge is as much cultural as it is political for Europe, which is more and more preoccupied with its identity, its borders, and its future. The opening of membership negotiations has alarmed the Europeans, prompting intense and unprecedented debates within the corridors of the European Parliament. The Muslim Turks, on the threshold of the European Union, are once again being imagined by turning back to Ottoman history and memory.

Although EU membership is a political issue. But in the case of Turkey, discussions show that he is beyond politics. It seems that the Europeans are convinced that Turkey is a mirror of the cultural and religious heritage of Europe, and this has sparked an existential reflection on nature and identity thanks to its close interest and active presence at the local and European levels. European Christian churches are among the actors most participating in these discussions in a highly secular Europe Since religion should have nothing to do with politics, what kind of position or role should churches assume? Has religion returned to the new Europe? This paper aims to look at how "Christian Europe", which has historically led the hostile response to Muslim Turks, is now in a position to integrate Muslim Turkey into the European Union.

Introduction:

Turkey's ties to Europe go back centuries, and with the European Union nearly half a century ago. However, it seems that membership will not be achieved soon. All parties, including Turkey, are convinced that the negotiation process with Ankara is not, and will not be, as it was with previous expansions. Although the road to the union is in principle the same for everyone, minor accidents seem that the path to Turkey's accession is full of obstacles and turbulent, the end of the road is not at all clear.

The research is divided into an introduction, two sections and a conclusion. The first topic is studied (Turkey's efforts to join the European Union between acceptance and rejection). While the second topic focused on (Islamic identity in Turkey's orientations towards the European Union), considering that identity as one of the most prominent obstacles to Turkish accession to the European Union. The time period was determined considering that the European Union was known by its current name after the signing of the Maastricht Agreement in the Netherlands in 1992, ending in 2004, the year in which the European Council approved the partnership document with Turkey.

the importance of studying:

The research specifically highlights the conditions necessary for it to start negotiations with Turkey and clearly become a member of the European Union through European agreements. These conditions are contained in a series of political and economic criteria. However, we note the emergence of a new criterion, which has not been officially determined, as Europe delved into the issue of Turkey's candidacy and invoked flimsy pretexts, which was not an absolute and a criterion for the other candidate countries. When Brussels (the seat of the European Union) and Turkey began to develop their relations that have been going on for half a century, the Europeans began to engage in dialogue and question the merit of its negotiations to accept the accession of Muslim Turkey. The discussions often take on a cultural tone in many Member States.

The fact that the opening of negotiations with the Turks coincided with Europe's aspirations for its identity and future, especially during the constitutional process, means that there is a fertile ground for judging Turkey's accession for cultural and religious reasons.

Study problem:

The research attempts to answer the following question: To what extent is Europe still Christian? As a result of the long process of secularization in Europe, religion has lost its influence and ability to frame political and social trends in Europe. Although this process has been tried to varying degrees, depending on the specific national and historical contexts of different European countries, religion today is far from its historical role in Europe as a decisive social and political actor. Despite the emergence of new forms of religiosity, this situation is especially true in Europe, which, moreover, is an exceptional case in the world.

The content of the research shows to those who oppose Turkey's membership in the European Union according to cultural arguments related to Islamic identity, that the religious factor did not prevent Turkish modernity throughout its modern history.

In general, we always note that Turkey's request and its endeavors to join the European Union raise questions and civilized and cultural issues. Most Europeans whisper to what extent Turkey's Islamic customs are in harmony with European culture and identity.

The first topic: Turkey's efforts to join the European Union between acceptance and rejection

Turkey submitted an application for full membership in the European Union on April 24, 1987, but it was met with a European rejection, and after several attempts, the Association Council approved on November 9, 1992(1), During its meeting in Brussels, Turkey accepted the accession of Turkey to the European Customs Unity Agreement as of December 31, 1995 (2),

In its report prepared in November 1994, the European Commission confirmed that **"Turkey has taken measures to develop its economy...it has almost reached an economic level that amounts to an integrated market economy, and that business and trade in it were consistent with the terms and timings of the Customs Union Agreement"**(3).

However, the aforementioned committee indicated that Turkey suffers from shortcomings in its human rights record, treatment of minorities, and commitment to democracy. Nevertheless, it decided to accept its accession to the customs union agreement(4) ,The European Parliament endorsed the decision on December 13, 1994, and the Common Committee of the Customs Union became the main body responsible for coordinating and ensuring the work and joint federal coordination committees between Turkey and the European Union(5) .

More than a decade after the coup of 1980, and the return of democracy in Turkey, which originally resulted from calls and pressures exerted by European countries on Turkish decision-makers, the European Commission developed its position on Turkey's candidacy for membership in the European Union. In 1997, the Commission considered that Turkey had become eligible for candidacy for membership. However, the decision to agree to join depended on the completion of the democratic transition and the fulfillment of economic conditions such as those related to financial stability, combating corruption, and managing public utilities(6) ,She referred to an alternative solution to full membership, in the event of Turkey's inability to fulfill its requirements, through the establishment of distinguished future political and economic relations based on expanding the customs union to include agricultural, industrial and tourism services and financial cooperation between the two parties(7).

During the European Summit held in Luxembourg in 1997, the admission of the candidate countries to the Union was approved, as the European Council affirmed that "Turkey is eligible for membership, and it is (a latent member) in it, and that its application for accession

is measured according to the same criteria applied to the rest of the countries wishing to join to the European Union(8) .

In an interview with the former President of the Republic, Suleyman Demirel 1993-2000 on January 22, 1998, he stressed that “Europe is wider than the European Union, and that Turkey will not change its view of itself as a European country, and that it will not neglect the idea of dealing with Europe”(9) .

Turkish relations with the European Union witnessed some improvement in early 1998. In February of that, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel invited Turkey to participate in the European Conference, stressing that the European community could not denounce Turkey's existence(10) .

French Minister of Foreign Affairs Hubert Vedrine stressed that his country seeks to fix the bad situation caused by the European rejection of Turkey(11) , During Demirel's visit to France in February 1998, agreements on economic and cultural cooperation were signed between the two countries. The French Minister indicated that not including Turkey in the European Union may have serious consequences. As for French President Jacques Chirac 1995-2007, he stressed, during the European Summit of Cardiff in June 1998, that **“the anchoring of Turkey in Europe must be ensured, because that is the best way to ensure its economic and democratic development”**(12) .

After the end of the work of the Cardiff Summit, the European Commission presented its report containing the Union's program on Turkey. This was followed by Turkey's participation, at a ministerial level, in the meeting of foreign ministers of the twelve candidate countries and members of the European Commission in Brussels on January 19, 1999. The Commission proposed During the conference, the Supreme Council increased European financial aid to Turkey to (150) million euros(13) .

Turkish hopes of accepting their country's membership in the European Union revived, especially after the arrival of Gerhard Schroder 1998-2005 to power in Germany, who promised to support Turkey's membership in the European Union. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer also stressed, during his visit to Ankara in July 1999, his country's support for Turkey, saying, **“The union's interest is to have a common future with Turkey”**(14) “ .

The Turkish and European efforts, especially the negotiations conducted by the Spanish Javier Solana, responsible for the foreign and security policy of the European Union, culminated in the recommendation of the European Commission in October 1999 to include Turkey as an official candidate in the European Union (15) .

After this recommendation, the European Union decided at the Helsinki Summit in mid-December 1999 to formally accept Turkey as a candidate country for membership within the Union's expansion plan along with other countries (16) .

The European Council, during the Nice Summit on December 4, 2000, approved the partnership document with Turkey as an essential step in Turkey's path towards full

membership. The document included short- and medium-term preferences, as well as goals that Turkey is required to achieve towards membership, as well as a set of steps to organize programs for progress and democracy. To achieve a set of goals set towards Turkey. The document represented a road map for Turkey's march towards the European Union (17) .

In order to complete the conditions and requirements of full membership, the Turkish government announced in March 2001 a reform program which was considered as a declaration (comprehensive initiatives) that address issues such as minorities⁽¹⁸⁾ , The role of the military in political and civil life, the Cyprus issue and relations with Greece. This was followed in October 2001 by the Turkish Grand National Assembly's adoption of a set of reforms that relatively reduced restrictions on human rights and the police's powers in relation to corruption and other crimes, as these reforms aimed To strengthen civilian representation in the Turkish National Security Council. In February 2002, the Council approved another package of reforms consisting of (14) articles, according to which the death penalty was abolished, except for those related to crimes committed during the war. Press and publications, subjecting the budget of the Turkish Grand National Council to strict financial control and raising the legal age in juvenile courts to (18) years instead of (15) years(19) .

These changes coincided with the decision of the European Summit of 2002, which postponed setting the date for the start of accession negotiations with Turkey until the end of 2004, while the final version of the enlargement of the Union authorized the inclusion of ten countries, including Cyprus, as of mid-2004. We can refer to the most important trends that emerged the controversy within the European Parliament, the decision-maker in the Union, about Turkey's membership is as follows(20) :

- 1-The Christian democratic trend insisted on Turkey remaining outside the European Union under multiple pretexts, the most important of which, in addition to geographical reasons, are historical roots, which show that Turkey did not share the European heritage, but rather was a representative of an Islamic empire belonging to the East. Not to mention the cultural difference between the two sides. And the issue of demographic growth, and many deputies of the Christian Democratic bloc in the European Parliament demanded recognition of the Christian identity of the European Union.
- 2-The European Left Movement, despite its deputies' refusal to give a religious character to the European Union, they did not sympathize with Turkey towards membership of the Union because of the internal and foreign policy pursued by Ankara during the Cold War. They take the Turks unconditional submission behind the West and Washington in particular. This current also adopted the cause of Turkey's Kurds, and preferred to defend them against the Turkish cultural and political (repression), as well as denouncing the Turkish government's policies against the Turkish trade union movement, and their opposition to any role of the Turkish military institution in political life.
- 3-The right-wing Christian Democrats, and some nationalists, are among the most vocal currents opposing Turkey's entry into the European Union because of their fear of the consequences of the entry of more than 80 million Muslims into the union on the one hand, and some of them opposing the current formula of the union in order to ensure the independence of their nation-states.

In the face of these developments, which aimed to withdraw the justifications for the European rejection of it, the decisions of the meeting of the leaders of the European Union countries in Brussels on December 17, 2004 came to mark a new stage in Turkey's relations with the European Union. The Italian European Commission President Romano Prodi announced the EU's (conditional) approval to start accession negotiations with Turkey⁽²¹⁾.

The second topic: Islamic identity in Turkey's orientations towards the European Union

During the discussions of Turkey's march towards full membership, a number of cultural and religious considerations were emphasized in the Europeans' rejection of Turkey's involvement in their institutions, and it seems that these attitudes have their roots in the past of Ottoman-European relations⁽²²⁾.

The Europeans do not want the existence of a state with a Muslim people in the European Union, especially after the adoption of the Islamic religion in its cultural concept raises great concern to them after it became popular among many circles in European societies as it represents a new danger to European civilization and its values after the communist danger has vanished. Therefore, European leaders did not hesitate Referring, either as a statement or as a hint, to the fact that their union is a (Christian club), the former German chancellor Willy Brandt told the Turkish ambassador in Bonn Enver Oymen frankly that "religion is an obstacle to his country's accession to Europe"⁽²³⁾.

As for Turk Ozal, the Turkish president 1989-1993, he indicated in 1992 that the main reason for rejecting Turkey's request to join the European Union is **"that Turkey's human rights record is fabricated for not accepting its request to join the European Union, and the reason is that we are Muslims and they are Christians, but they do not say that"**⁽²⁴⁾.

Tansu Ciller also warned that the continued European rejection of Turkey will not find an explanation for the Turks except that they are a Muslim people, and attacked the German Chancellor's anti-Turkey stances against the backdrop of the decisions of the Christian Parties Conference held on March 9, 1997 rejecting Turkey's accession to the European Union⁽²⁵⁾,

This was also confirmed by Mesut Yilmaz, who pointed the finger at German Chancellor Helmut Kohl from 1982-1998 of seeking to turn Europe into a Christian club. cultural identity⁽²⁶⁾.

As the former Turkish Foreign Minister, Ismail Cem, described the Europeans as narrow-minded, he warned the European Union that it was not in its interest to remain as a closed Christian club, pointing out that Turkey gives Europe various links to the East with its commitment to the basics of European culture, democracy and human rights, equality and secularism, As well as wide economic markets for European industries⁽²⁷⁾.

On their part, the Turkish leaders, in an attempt to overcome cultural and civilizational dilemmas, emphasized the harmony and non-contradiction between the different cultural beliefs and sects in Turkey as a model that can be followed to achieve harmony between the Turkish and European models despite their religious differences⁽²⁸⁾.

In an attempt by Turkish politicians to emphasize the truth of the tolerance of the Islamic religion, and that Ottoman Islam was not fanatical or fundamentalist Islam, with a constant reminder that the Ottoman Empire was, throughout its long history, a safe haven for

many other religions fleeing from the oppression and liquidation of the Spanish Inquisition in 1493, which was confirmed Turkut Ozal said to him: **"I am a Muslim and have many friends from Europe and the United States, and I have no disagreement with them... Turkey is a country outside the scope of Islamic (fundamentalism). It is a new model for the rest of the Islamic world"**⁽²⁹⁾ .

During the Dutch presidency of the European Union during the last six months of 2004, the European Union had to decide whether it intended to open membership negotiations with Turkey as a member state. Officially, this decision depends on whether the country enjoys a stable constitutional democracy that guarantees the rule of law, human rights and minority rights, the so-called Copenhagen political criterion⁽³⁰⁾ .In the public debate, other considerations also played a role, along with many practical objections to Turkish membership (the size of the country, poverty, rural nature, as well as its many unstable neighbours),⁽³¹⁾ Objections to the cultural and religious nature increased. Whatever the case, Turkey has a cultural and religious history that is different from the history of Europe and values that do not correspond to those of Europe. Almost all of the national governments of the member states, the European Commission and the European Parliament have adopted a wait-and-see policy on this issue. Issues such as culture and religion have had an impact on European politicians and observers, which involves the question of whether Turkey is able to guarantee religious freedoms⁽³²⁾ .

By studying the identity of Turkish Islam separately and in depth, and the extent to which this identity is an obstacle to Turkey's membership in the European Union, and in light of the legitimate requirements of a secular, democratic constitutional state, the decision for Turkish membership, in full, is overshadowed by vague feelings of unease⁽³³⁾ ,Because the implicit European arguments against the Turks as bearing a religious heritage, it is unreasonable for the country to fulfill them. Unlike the European Commission⁽³⁴⁾ ,

The Turks show great interest in developing the relationship between Turkish Islam and the secular state, as well as its historical foundations. Moreover, we note the rapidly changing relationship between religion, state, and society in Turkey⁽³⁵⁾ .

Turkish President Abdullah Gul said: **"The growing hostility to Islam in Europe is incompatible with the spirit of European values"**. Gul agrees with some Turks that "Islamophobia"⁽³⁶⁾It is the major obstacle facing Turkey's path to membership in the European Union, and Gul added about his assessment of the accession talks with the European Union, **"Turkey seeks to join the European Union, but there may come a day when Turkey may refuse to join the European Union"**⁽³⁷⁾ .

The European Constitution, adopted by Heads of Government in June 2004, emphasizes the importance of a union of values. The main preamble states: **"Inspired by the cultural, religious and human legacy of Europe, which has developed the unmanipulable universal values of human rights, democracy, equality, freedom and the rule of law, and the belief that Europe, united after its bitter trials, intends to move forward on the path of civilization, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged; that it wishes to remain a continent open to culture, learning and social progress; that it wishes to deepen the democratic nature**

and transparency of public life, and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world“(38).

In this section, we would like to answer the question that includes the extent to which the fact that Turkey is a Muslim-majority country is affected as an insurmountable obstacle to its membership in the European Union. In other words: Does Islam prevent Turkey from joining the European Union?

Many difficulties are encountered against Turkey's membership in the European Union that "Islam" and "Europe" are two different entities and meet only historically(39). Such pretexts usually see Muslims as a new group of post-World War II immigrants and their direct descendants, who belong to "Islamic fundamentalism" (40). Such views build unrealistic generalizations, in which the West and Islam are synonymous with different civilizations that are fundamentally incompatible.

The Turkish government, led by an Islamist-leaning party (Justice and Development Party), is strongly inclined in favor of EU membership(41),

Because he sees that the union is a guarantor of religious freedoms against the state and the army. He supports the European Union's demand for a more flexible stance towards Islam, but he has to tread carefully (42).

It must take into account the anti-Islamic sentiments prevailing among European citizens, and perhaps their governments, as well as Turkish governments, especially in the state apparatus, the army and the judiciary(43). The practice of separating state and religion, which this institution cherishes, goes back much further, as the secular character of the state also enjoys wide acceptance (44).

The question of whether Islam, democracy and human rights can go hand in hand has important practical consequences for Turkey, a Muslim country aspiring to EU membership. Indeed, the EU's political leaders have defined the union as a community of values, those on which society is based, and which reflect the formality in the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria, which are applied to judge a potential member's candidacy(45). Its basic elements are democracy and human rights, but the concept of none of them is unambiguously described or defined in EU documents(46). As far as the criterion of "**democracy**" is concerned, this means that the European Union does not apply an absolute criterion for democratic governance. Most concepts give multiple manifestations (47). Thus, the union does not limit itself to one model, and the so-called annual regular reports are nothing but a process of periodic definition of monitoring objectives.

Undoubtedly, there are many trends in Europe that oppose Turkey's access to the European Union, and look at this issue from the point of view of religious and cultural difference, and although Europe has tried more than once to refute this issue and search for parallel obstacles, the issue of "**Christian Club**" Those unwilling to join a Muslim country such as Turkey remained prominent on the features of European rejection(48).

Turkish Prime Minister (Recep Tayyip Erdogan) said, "**Turkey has been insulted. There are countries that are candidates to join the European Union that have not achieved the progress we have achieved, and this thing we cannot understand. We have done everything that is required of us**". Erdogan also affirmed that Islam Democracy and democracy are not in conflict, and he stressed that democracy is essential to the development

of the Islamic world, and that he does not adopt the special view that **“Islamic culture and democracy cannot be reconciled”**⁽⁴⁹⁾.

On a visit by Turkish President Erdogan to Finland in 2002, he indicated that **“Muslims may have doubts that the European Union accepts only Christians for membership”**. He added that Turkey is a bridge of connection between the Islamic world and the West, and that the European Union cannot remain a closed Christian club, and that He must accept Turkey’s accession to it, to prove that it is a union of political and humanitarian values and principles. He also condemned terrorism, saying: **“The terrorists exploit the Islamic religion for their own benefit, and that they are not true Muslims, and one of the principles of the Islamic religion is that killing the human soul is equal to destroying the house of God and killing all human beings”**⁽⁵⁰⁾.

European fears have increased about Turkey being an Islamic state, and its effects on Christian Europe. In the event that Islamic Turkey joins the European Union, it will become the largest member state in terms of population within the next twenty years, and thus the imbalance in the population census among the Turkish people And the European peoples will lead to the gradual domination of the Turkish race in the European region, which leads to the awakening of internal social, cultural and religious problems, and the most serious of these problems are the differences between the political trends that revolve around issues of the Islamic religion⁽⁵¹⁾.

That the European Union is working to postpone Turkey's integration into the European Union, and it seeks to create obstacles in order to keep Turkey away from this accession as long as possible, which prompts Turkey to search for other options and work to develop its relations with it⁽⁵²⁾.

Conclusions:

Turkey found its salvation and security in the European Union to advance the floundering Turkish reality that witnessed violent tremors in the nineties of the last century, whether from the political or economic aspect, as several factors played to consolidate this conviction, the most important of which is Turkey’s strategic location, which played a prominent role in increasing the strength of this trend, especially In the Cold War, as Turkey stood in the face of the Soviet expansionist endeavors towards Europe, so Turkey worked to join everything that is European, as it participated in all Western European organizations and institutions, demonstrating its desire to open up towards Europe and join the European community, in addition to that the Turkish elites see the trend Towards the European Union is a defense factor to preserve and preserve its secular option without collapsing, especially after the rise of the Islamic tide and its arrival to power led by the Justice and Development Party.

However, most Turkish politicians have become suspicious of the sincerity of the European Union's intentions towards their country, as the credibility of the European Union was questioned at all levels in Turkey, whether from the ruling elites or from Turkish society, and this distrust is rooted as a natural result of European responses towards Turkey's membership requests to it. The European Union has succeeded in placing obstacles and long-term obstacles in front of the Turkish approach, and with all the reforms and restructuring of

its problems, whether external or internal, the European Union is confronted by its stagnation and lack of interest, creating new obstacles. The European Union sees the difficulty of entering a Muslim country with a population density of more than eighty million to this club, forgetting the services Turkey provided to it.

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